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Description

BIOCHIP AND METHOD FOR USING THE SAME

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TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to a biochip having a plurality of biopolymer spots arranged thereon such as probe DNAs that specifically hybridize with a specific DNA or protein.

BACKGROUND ART

In the biochemistry research of genes or the like, conventionally and presently, biochips have been employed which are made from an immobilization support such as glass or a nylon or nitrocellulose membrane spotted with biopolymers such as DNA or protein in a high-dense pattern. Figure 2 is a schematic view of a conventional biochip. The biochip 20 is provided with an immobilization substrate 21 whose surface is spotted with various types of DNAs 22 in a predetermined pattern. Since the shapes of biochips 20 are identical, there is no way of identifying each biochip by its appearance, nor can the types of the spotted DNAs be identified. Therefore, biochips have been managed by writing an identification number 23 or by providing a barcode on the corner of the biochip 20. In this case, the biochips are managed by leaving a note of information of what kind of DNAs

are spotted on which locations on a biochip with a particular identification number or barcode.

According to the above-described method, the biochip may be identified by using two pieces of information written on separate components. However since academic information such as what kinds of nucleic acid sequences of DNAs are spotted on the chip has to be managed as another piece of information, it is often mistakenly used during the experiment.

The present invention aims at solving such problems of conventional technique, and provides a biochip whose information can unitarily be managed and provides a method for using the biochip.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

According to the present invention, the above-described aim is accomplished by integrating a memory into a biochip so as to store information such as types, amounts and spotting locations of spotted DNAs. This biochip allows the entire information of the biochip (e.g., what kind of DNAs are spotted on which locations of the biochip, and when, by whom and in what kind of experiment the biochip was used) to unitarily be managed.

Specifically, the biochip of the invention is provided with a surface on which a plurality of biopolymers are spotted in a predetermined pattern, and a storage medium for storing information of the spotted biopolymers.

The biochip according to the present invention is provided with a surface spotted with a plurality of biopolymers such as DNAs and proteins in a predetermined pattern, and a storage medium for storing information of the biopolymers. The DNAs that are spotted on the biochip may be a plurality of probe DNAs or DNAs from individuals, which are used for genetic diagnosis or gene expression analysis.

The component with the biopolymer-spotted surface and the storage medium may be detachable from each other or they may be formed integrally. Preferably, the storage medium is a semiconductor memory capable of reading/writing information in a non-contact state.

The storage medium may be stored with information of the spotting locations on the surface of the biochip in relation to information of the biopolymers spotted on the spotting locations. The information of the spotting locations may be represented, for example, by sequential numbers of the patterned spot, or coordinates representing the spotting locations. The information of the biopolymers

to be stored may be, for example, information of nucleotide sequences of the DNAs, genetic diseases relative to the DNAs, genes relative to the DNAs, and the amounts of spots.

The biochip having the storage medium of the invention is used as follows. A plurality of biopolymers are spotted onto the surface of the biochip in a predetermined pattern. The storage medium is written with information of the spotting locations as well as information of the biopolymers (e.g., DNA nucleotide sequences) spotted on the spotting locations. The information may be written to the storage medium every time when the biopolymers are spotted, or may be written afterwards at one time.

The biochip of the invention whose surface is spotted with a plurality of biopolymers in a predetermined pattern, and which is provided with a storage medium for storing information of the spotting locations in relation to the information of the biopolymers spotted on the spotting locations, is used as follows. A sample is allowed to contact with the biochip; a spotting location that hybridized with the sample is detected by utilizing fluorescence from a fluorescent label; the database in the storage medium is searched for information of the sample-hybridized biopolymer based on the detected hybridized spotting location; and the result is displayed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a schematic view showing an exemplary biochip of the invention;

Figure 2 is a schematic view showing a conventional biochip;

Figure 3 is a schematic view showing another exemplary biochip of the invention;

Figure 4 is a schematic view showing yet another exemplary biochip of the invention;

Figure 5 is a schematic diagram showing an example of information to be stored in the storage medium attached to the biochip;

Figure 6 is a view for illustrating the process for producing the biochip;

Figure 7 is a view for illustrating a step for inspecting the biochip;

Figure 8 is a view for illustrating hybridization process using the biochip of the invention;

Figure 9 is a view for illustrating process for reading the biochip of the invention;

Figure 10 is a view showing an example of a screen for displaying results obtained with the biochip;

Figure 11 is a view showing another example of a screen for displaying results obtained with the biochip;

Figure 12 is a diagram showing processes of reading and analyzing biochip image/memory information; and

Figure 13 is a flow chart for illustrating processes of reading and analyzing biochip image/memory information.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

Hereinafter, the present invention will be described in detail with reference to the drawings.

Figure 1 is a schematic view showing an exemplary biochip of the invention. The exemplary biochip 10 is provided with an immobilization substrate 11 (such as a glass, nylon or nitrocellulose membrane) and a storage medium 13, the substrate 11 being spotted with biopolymers 12 (such as DNAs or proteins) at about 10,000/cm². The surface of the

storage medium 13 needs to be covered with plastic, glass or the like or otherwise the storage medium 13 may be exposed, together with the biopolymers 12, to a sample solution upon hybridization. The biochip 10 is made, for example, with a semiconductor memory support (such as a silicon wafer) as the immobilization substrate 11; a semiconductor memory formed on part of the support as the storage medium 13, the top of the memory being covered with a resin or the like; and biopolymers 12 such as DNAs directly spotted onto the remaining surface of the silicon support. This approach allows minimization of the biochip.

Figure 3 is a schematic view showing another example of the biochip of the invention. This exemplary biochip 30 includes a case 34 and a chip 31 whose surface is spotted with biopolymers 32 such as DNAs. The case 34 has a storage medium 33a imbedded therein, and has a cavity 35 for accommodating the chip 31. The storage medium 33a is an IC memory which is connected to a looped antenna 33b which is also imbedded in the case 34, thereby forming a non-contact storage means 33.

The non-contact storage means 33 receives an electromagnetic wave sent from a reader/writer located close to the biochip 30 via the antenna 33b. An electromotive force generated by electromagnetic induction is used as

electric power for data communication to write/read information to/from the storage medium ^{33a}~~33b~~. The non-contact storage means ³³~~30~~ reads/writes information in a non-contact state without requiring an externally exposed terminal and thus is completely enclosed and isolated from the external environment. Accordingly, the non-contact storage means 33 is preferable as a memory for a biochip that is exposed to a reagent or a sample solution.

The biochip 30 shown in Figure 3 is used generally as follows. The process for spotting biopolymers onto the biochip 30 is conducted with only the chip 31 separated from the case 34. Then, the chip 31 is fit into the cavity 35 of the case 34 to form an integral body. The integrated biochip 30 is subjected to a later-described inspection step shown in Figure 7 to write inspection information to the memory medium 33a of the non-contact storage means 33. Then, the chip 31 is separated from the case 33 and immersed into a hybridization solution to perform a later-described hybridization reaction step shown in Figure 8. After the hybridization reaction, the chip 31 is again assembled with the case 34 to perform a later-described reading process shown in Figure 9. Data obtained through the reading process is stored into the storage medium 33a of the non-contact storage means 33.

According to the biochip 30 of a system shown in Figure 3, the case 34 provided with the non-contact storage means 33 is not exposed to a solution during the hybridization reaction. Accordingly, there is less limitation as to the material used for the case 34. Since the case 34 is not exposed to a solution, a contact-type storage means whose terminals and the like are exposed above the surface of the case may be used instead of the non-contact storage means 33. The case 34 may be reused by deleting the stored data in the storage medium 33a.

Figure 4 is a schematic view showing another example of a biochip of the invention. This exemplary biochip 40 is produced by: partially forming a cavity in an immobilization substrate 41 (such as glass or plastic) by an etching process or the like; placing a non-contact storage means 43 made from a looped antenna 43b and a storage medium 43a connected thereto; and imbedding the storage medium 43a with a resin or the like. The surface of the immobilization substrate 41 is spotted with biopolymers 42 such as DNAs in a predetermined pattern. The biochip of such a system has a simple mechanism as compared to the biochip shown in Figure 3. Since the storage medium is integrally imbedded in the material to be spotted with the biopolymers, the entire biochip may be minimized.

Figure 5 is a diagram showing an example of information to be stored in a storage medium for a single biochip. The information to be stored include general information of the biochip such as a serial number, a fabrication lot number, date/time of preparation, the number of spots on the biochip, and other additional chip information, as well as information of respective spots on the biochip. The information of respective spots on the biochip include, for example, spot numbers, X-Y-coordinates on the biochip, spotting conditions such as amount and time of spotting, and additional information such as names and functions of the spotted DNAs or proteins. The spot numbers are sequentially provided in accordance with the order of spotting. The X-Y coordinates are represented, for example, while the origin is at the upper left corner of the biochip. When the biochip is used for DNA diagnosis, information of an individual and information usually written in a clinical record may also be stored.

A method for managing information in the chip will be described with reference to Figures 6 to 9. Figure 6 is a view for illustrating process for producing the biochip. A microplate 61 has various biopolymers (for example, sample DNAs 62 having known nucleotide sequences) placed at known respective locations. Under the control of a drive controller 65 controlled by a computer 66, a pin 64 is

transferred to a predetermined location on the microplate 61 with an X-Y driver 63 and made to contact at the tip thereof with the DNA at that location. The pin 64 is again transferred to a predetermined location on the biochip 1 to spot the DNA onto the surface of the chip, thereby forming a DNA spot 2 on the biochip 1. By repeating this action, each sample DNA 62 on the microplate 61 will be spotted onto the biochip 1 in a predetermined pattern. The biochip 1 is provided with a memory 3.

The computer 66 commands a reader/writer 67 to write to the memory 3, spot numbers, spotting locations, nucleic acid sequences of the sample DNAs 62 applied to the spotting locations, name of the genes, the number and location of the microplate 61 and preparation date of the biochip 1, for example, as in a format shown in Figure 5. The reader/writer 67 is preferably of a non-contact type, but may be a contact-type for biochips such as one shown in Figure 3. The information may be written with the reader/writer 67 one at a time synchronous with the spotting operation or at one time after completing the entire spotting manipulation.

Figure 7 is a view for illustrating a step for inspecting the biochip. In this step, the biochip 1 produced through the process shown in Figure 6 is subjected to an inspection of, for example, whether the DNAs are spotted

appropriately onto all of the spotting locations 2. The inspection results are written to the memory 3 of the biochip.

An image of the spot arrangement on the biochip 1 is taken with an image pick-up camera 71 such as a CCD camera and the image data is transferred to the computer 66 via a reading controller 72. The computer 66 analyzes the image data of the spot arrangement to detect defective spots where an amount of spotted DNA is inadequate. All of the sample DNAs 62 on the microplate 61 may be provided with a fluorescent material such as FITC (fluorescein isothiocyanate), in which case spot points 2 may be irradiated with excitation light from an argon ion laser or the like, so as to detect defective spots based on the presence and absence of the fluorescent light from the fluorescent material at each spotting location. The fluorescent intensity from each spot may also be measured so as to detect the amount of DNA spotted onto each spot. The spot number of the defective spot, the amount of DNA spotted onto each spot may be written to the memory 3 with the reader/writer 67 under the control of the computer 66.

After the inspection step shown in Figure 7, the DNA of the defective spot may be spotted again by the spotting step shown in Figure 6. In this case, the location to be spotted again may be the same as the location found to be defective

or may be at an alternative location different from the first spotting location. Furthermore, instead of directly taking the image of the spot arrangement on the biochip, it may be taken via a phase contrast microscope.

Figure 8 is a view for illustrating a hybridization process using the biochip of the invention. As shown in the figure, the biochip 1 provided with the storage medium 3 and the biopolymers 2 such as DNAs, together with fluorescent-labeled sample DNA 82, is placed into a hybridization solution 81 for hybridization. When there is a complementary DNA sequence between the DNA 2 spotted on the biochip 1 and the sample DNA 82, the DNAs bind to each other and form a duplex structure on the spot.

Figure 9 is a view for illustrating the reading and analyzing processes of the biochip of the invention. The DNA of the spot 2 on the biochip 1 which has bound with the sample DNA is detected by radiating excitation light to the spots 2 on the biochip 1 and reading the fluorescence emitted from the spot with an optical sensor (such as a CCD 71). The data read with the optical sensor is transferred to the computer 66 via the reading controller 72. The computer 66 uses information of the fluorescence location on the biochip 1 read with the optical sensor, and information of the spot read from the memory 3 of the biochip 1 using the

reader/writer 67, thereby deriving information of the sample DNA on the biochip that hybridized with the DNA. Specifically, from the results read with the optical sensor, the information in the memory 3 corresponding to the DNA on the biochip 1 which is suspected to have hybridized is output to the display of the computer 66.

The data is normalized based on the difference between the data of the amount of the DNA of the spot stored in the memory 3 and the amount of the DNA that hybridized obtained with the optical sensor. The results are written to the memory 3 with the reader/writer 67. Accordingly, the information can unitarily be managed. In addition, quantitative analysis and expression level analysis are also possible.

Figures 10 and 11 are views showing exemplary screens displaying analysis results obtained with the biochip as described with reference to Figure 9. The exemplary screen shown in Figure 10 displays fluorescent intensity image of the biochip read with the optical sensor. When the operator points the image of the spot that (s)he wants to know in detail (e.g., with a mouse cursor), the additional information stored in the memory will be read out with the reader/writer 67 and displayed on the screen.

processes with a noise filtering module 92 and an image peak recognizing module 93, respectively, thereby determining the peak coordinates and intensity of the fluorescence at each spot.

Then, the memory information reading module 94 instructs the biochip reader 70 to read spot information stored in the memory 3 on the biochip 1. The spot information read out is transferred to the computer 66. An image/memory information corresponding module 95 corresponds the spot information with information of the image data, peak coordinates and fluorescent intensity. An image/memory information screen displaying module 96 displays the corresponded image/memory information on an RGB display 102. An image/memory information storing module 97 stores the image/memory information in a storage medium 110 such as a hard disk device 111, a floppy disk device 112 or the biochip 1. Each of the modules shown in Figure 12 may be realized by a software program.

Figure 13 is a flow chart for illustrating processes of reading and analyzing biochip image/memory information. The reading device and the like are initialized, followed by chip image reading process (S11) for reading fluorescent intensities of spots 2 on the biochip 1 with the optical sensor such as the CCD 71; process (S12) for reading spot

information stored in memory 3 of the biochip 1; process (S13) for recognizing peak coordinates and peak intensities of the fluorescence of the spots of the chip image; and process (S14) for corresponding the spot peak information obtained from the chip image and the spot information stored in the memory. The information obtained through such a series of process, according to the selected display format at S15, is subjected to process for displaying the chip image and information of a spot at a cursor point (S16) or to process for displaying the list of spot intensities and spot information (S17). The chip image, spot intensities and spot information are stored in a storage medium such as the hard disc device 111, the floppy disc device 112 or the biochip 1. Thus, a terminating process terminates the reading/analyzing process of the biochip image/memory information.

The biochip of the invention provided with a memory allows unitary management of information by storing data of, for example, a sample DNA and experimental environment used for the biochip, as well as the results of an analysis or the like in the memory. Accordingly, an experimental error can be avoided. Moreover, accurate experimental results can be obtained if information of an amount of each of the DNAs on the chip is stored in the memory in advance such that the results are obtained based on the difference from the amount of DNA upon chip reading after the hybridization experiment

or the like. In the case where the results of the analysis are managed as a database, the information may directly be read from the memory so that information may be managed in a facilitated manner.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICATION

According to the present invention, unitary management of information is realized by storing information of a biochip in the biochip itself, thereby preventing errors and realizing rapid and accurate process.